Canada

CANADIAN COAST GUARD SHIP NAHIDIK

The responsibility for keeping the vital Mackenzie-Athabaska and Arctic Coast waterways safe for navigation lies with the pathfinders of the Hay River District of the Canadian Coast Guard's Western Region. The Coast Guard ships NAHIDIK, DUMIT, TEMBAH and ECKALOO whose names appropriately mean "pathfinder" in four different native dialects, perform a variety of tasks in support of shipping in Canada's Arctic.

NAHIDIK, a shallow draft buoy tending vessel, was built by Allied Shipyard in North Vancouver in 1974. Three sister ships, built at the same time, are employed as tugs with the commercial fleets carrying supplies to the Inuit communities of the Western Arctic.

NAHIDIK's tug design gives her a high horsepower rating and towing capacity. The vessel's twin propeller and shallow hull configuration allow navigation in the shallow Mackenzie River and delta. The ship's broad beam provides excellent stability, making it equally at home in the open sea. The 53 metre long vessel has a beam of 15.25 metres and displaces 855 tons. The draft ranges between 1.4 metres for river work to 1.8 metres while working in the Western Arctic. The vessel is powered by two General Motors diesel engines developing 4300 HP which give a normal operating speed of 14 knots. NAHIDIK is the largest of the 4 special purpose vessels which operate out of the Coast Guard base at Hay River in the Northwest Territories and the only vessel of the compliment which services the Arctic coastline.

Every year the NAHIDIK and her 15-person crew are responsible for safety of navigation in Zone 4, which extends from Tuktoyaktuk to Herschel Island in the west to Cambridge Bay in the east. Duties include the installation and maintenance of fixed and floating aids, waterways development, and marine pollution counter measures. NAHIDIK participates in an average of four search and rescue missions each year. The ship is also used by other organizations such as the Polar Shelf Geophysical Survey Group of Energy, Mines and Resources, Canada.

During the busy summer season the vessel will travel about 17,500 kilometers while servicing 250 floating and 107 fixed aids to navigation such as beacon towers and fog signals ashore. During her normal oceanographic operations she will steam an additional 3000 kilometers. A Coast Guard MBB B0-105 helicopter is carried aboard for part of the season to assist in tasks such as delivery of essential supplies to isolated communities and the assembly of towers which hold vital navigational aids.

The season begins in late May when the spectacular and destructive breakup of the ice carves new channels, changing the course of the river and frequently requiring the remarking of the safe channel. The ice on Great Slave lake usually breaks up in the first week of June, allowing the NAHIDIK and the other Hay River vessels DUMIT, TEMBAH and ECKALOO access to the river to begin preparing the route for the commercial vessels following close behind.

NAHIDIK's first task of the year is to service fixed and floating aids to navigation in the lower (northern) Mackenzie River and delta, then proceed to Tuktoyaktuk to replace the floating aids in the harbour entrance. Using Tuktoyaktuk as a base, the ship services and replaces aids from Herschel Island to Cape Perry in the Beaufort Sea. By the end of July, with the river work completed, the NAHIDIK makes a rendezvous with one of the Western Region's two icebreakers, the GEORGE R. PEARKES or the MARTHA L. BLACK.

Once she reaches the open sea, NAHIDIK's main task is to stay ahead of the supply barges, replacing and servicing navigation aids which mark the entrance to isolated communities. From the Beaufort Sea the Coast Guard ships move east preparing the route for the supply vessels to service approximately 30 sites including the communities of Sachs Harbour, Paulatuk, Holman Island, Coppermine, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven and Spence Bay.

During September, NAHIDIK is normally employed by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources as a floating platform for scientific experiments and research. Near the end of the month, when the research work is complete and coastal waters begin to freeze, NAHIDIK waits for the last of the commercial vessels to enter the Mackenzie River before removing floating aids in the river and delta and replacing them with expendable channel markers. The last of the vessels begin a race against the freeze up and falling water levels as they make their way back upstream to Hay River. If successful, NAHIDIK should arrive at the Coast Guard base in Hay River by the middle of October, to be winterized to await the next season.

The peoples of the Western Arctic look forward to the annual visit of the NAHIDIK and crew. Over the years the crews and communities of the North have forged close ties. Each looks forward to the challenges of the coming season which will bring them together once again.

CCG Western Region
Aids to Navigation

NAME	TYPE	BASE
MARTHA L. BLACK	aids tender/ icebreaker	Prince Rupert
GEORGE R. PEARKES	aids tender/ icebreaker	Victoria
SIR JAMES DOUGLAS	aids tender	Victoria
MISKANAW	aids tender	Fort McMurray
DUMIT	aids tender	Hay River
TEMBAH	aids tender	Hay River
ECKALOO	aids tender	Hay River
NAHIDIK	aids tender	Hay River
CLOO-STUNG	aids tender	Prince Rupert
HELICOPTERS (2)	aids servicing/ supply unit	Prince Rupert
HELICOPTERS (4)	aids servicing	Victoria

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